“The Trail of Blood and Tears” #2

In the first lesson on “The Trail of Blood and Tears” we addressed three areas: (1) O.T suffering and martyrdom (2) suffering and persecution during the days of the apostles in the first years of the church (perpetrated primarily by the Jews and their hate of Christ and his followers) (3) Imperial persecution with efforts of the Roman emperors to destroy or totally cripple the Christian church, which began with the emperor Nero and lasted until the reign of Constantine.

It is significant that all three of these eras, and especially those of N.T. times, were perpetrated by religious hatred, bitterness, jealousy and bigotry. In the first century, persecutions were carried on by the unbelieving Jewish population. During this time the apostles and other first century ministers of the gospel of Christ, were beaten, imprisoned and martyred. While some met their fate by the Pagans, the worst cruelties and sufferings were inflicted by the Jewish hierarchy and zealots. Then, beginning with Nero, imperial persecutions set in. In both instances it was religious hatred and bitterness that drove the persecutions. Many saints were executed for refusing to bow before some pagan god. Even in O.T. sufferings, religion was a leading factor. Of Daniel they said they could not find any fault in him unless they found it of his God. The 3 Hebrews and the furnace of fire were sparked by religious hatred. Many other O.T. examples of persecution because of religious hatred of Jehovah God are available.

This irony and reality of persecutions because of a false religion embittered against the truth will only be magnified as we observe orthodox religion of the dark ages inflict an even greater measure of religious tyranny against the saints than any others that preceded it. In the time of Justinian and forward, any religion except the “orthodox Roman Church” was outlawed by Roman law and subject to severe punishments for violations. The strange and diabolical pursuit of all “heresies” and “heretics” (people who did not agree with “orthodoxy”) is that imperial law facilitated and sanctioned the religious tyranny of the state ordained church, whose barbaric atrocities grew as the church plummeted into the abyss of the dark ages. Thus, in addition to the aforementioned (3) eras of religious persecution against the saints of God due to religious bigotry and hatred against the truth of God, we shall likewise find that the millions of martyrs for their faith in Christ during the dark ages also resulted from religious tyranny and diabolical presumptions of power, lust, greed and moral corruption.

In the prophecy of Daniel (ch. 8:13; 12:11), he spoke of an era which corresponds to the time of the dark ages as the “abomination of desolation”. (Not to be confused with an abomination referred to in chapter 9 of his book). Abomination of desolation is a well deserved description of the religious system that dominated the world from the 6th through the 18th centuries. The driving force behind centuries of religious tyranny and millions of martyrs for Christ was a system in disharmony with Biblical doctrine, empowered by a world religious system that even the civil powers were subject to. In addition to this, the moral corruption that went hand in hand with false creeds, mysticisms, image and saint worship, and a godless presumption of “divine authority”, was the impetus behind the barbaric treatment of a remnant of believing Christians seeking freedom to worship God as the Bible directed.

More than this, the preposterous, abominable and hypocritical fact of centuries of torture, tyranny, barbarism, indignities and cruelties beyond description, is that they were carried on in the name of the humble, loving Christ, who taught that even our enemies should be loved. This era of the church approved of centuries of despicable and atrocious treatment against anyone daring to oppose its proclaimed dominion over mind and heart. Let us turn now to the record of history for the undeniable account of persecutions against believers in Christ by the “Jezebel” of the Thyatiran church age, who sought to destroy every vestige of the word of God and those who dared believe it.

To begin this journey of the unbelievable atrocities and barbaric treatment by the church of Rome against anyone who dared seek out and obey the word of God apart from papal teachings, we are going to present our first example from the record of “St. Bartholomew’s massacre”, which occurred in August, 1572, after the reformation was well under way. After this we will go back to earlier accounts of persecution.

The setting for this massacre, other than occurring on St. Bartholomew’s day of observance, was a wedding feast in Paris, between the sister of the king of France and the prince of Navarre, the captain and prince of the Protestants. The wedding festivities served as a distraction from the plans by the king and queen (both Roman faithful) to assemble and prepare his soldiers for a sanguinary ambush on the Protestants. The plan was to use the merriment of the wedding festival; the cover of night; and the occasion of St. Bartholomew’s day, to slaughter the Protestants and was intended to completely destroy the entire movement.

The soldiers were appointed at a certain signal to burst out instantly to the slaughter in all parts of the city of Paris. They first killed Admiral Coligny; cut off his head and sent it to the pope. Then they slew many great and honorable persons who were Protestants. Then they fell among the common people and continued the slaughter for many days, killing upwards of 10,000. Then the destruction spread from Paris throughout the country.

At Orleans, 1000 were slain. At Lyons, 800 were massacred. Here children clinging to their parents as their parents embraced them, while they all were slain with the sword. At Augustobona, Avaricum, Troys, Toulose, Rouen and other cities, the slaughter continued. Very few Protestants escaped this bloody, beastly massacre.

A mother was giving birth to a baby when the butchers broke into the room, and drove a sword through her chest. They took her body and threw her from a balcony, whereupon the baby came forth. A nearby soldier grabbed the baby and thrust it through with a sword and threw it in the nearby stream.

Children were abused by the soldiers while their parents were forced to watch, and afterwards were slain. One woman was abused and then forced to hold the sword while soldiers forced it through her husband.

The slain, too many to bury, were left to decompose and for wild birds. Every conceivable method of torture and massacre were used. At the end of one week, it is said that about 100,000 Protestants were cut to death.

In the royal saloon of the Vatican at Rome was hung a painting of the massacre with the following inscription: “The pope approves of Colignys’ death”. At Rome the joy was so great, that they appointed a day of high festival, and a jubilee, with every expression of joy and gladness they could devise. The man who first carried the news of the massacre to Rome, was given 1000 crowns by the cardinal of Lorraine. The king commanded the day to be kept with every demonstration of joy, with the statement that now the whole race of Huguenots was extinct.

There is much more about this single event, where papists, priests, monks, cardinals, the pope, the emperor and queen, and in general the whole Roman church demonstrated a spirit of butchery, defilement, inhumanity and every possible abomination, greater than all past history reveals.

AND IT WAS ALL DONE IN THE NAME OF CHRIST AND THE CHURCH, AND UNDER THE AUTHORITY OF THE “HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE”. And this is the account of only one planned massacre, with hundreds more to tell about.

Where, we might ask, did the church of Rome start down a path that led to such uncontrolled claims of authority and unbridled tyranny, and how did it come to actually have authority over emperors and civil powers also? This abuse of power ultimately led to barbaric actions of inhumanity and obscene persecutions as demonstrated in the St. Bartholomew’s massacre as well as thousands more throughout her centuries of a reign of terror.

The answer, even though beginning in very subtle ways and events, yet it is, we believe, defined and empowered in the reign of Emperor Justinian, beginning in 527AD. In 529, through the “Justinian code” of Roman law, two major facts of this law, facilitated and empowered the Roman church with such supremacy that it opened the door leading, inexorably, down the path of ultimate tyranny and bloodshed. Those two things were: (1) The total outlawing of Paganism and **“any other form of religious expression other than that of orthodox Rome”; (2) the subjection of “imperial rights and authority” to the “Holy See” of the Roman church.** This was a recipe made to order to pave the way for the grossest “abomination of desolation” in all the history of the world.

In our country and under our laws, we can hardly imagine allowing the kind of treatment of faithful Christians brought against those of the Justinian era and following by the laws of Rome. Every historian writing about the dark age of the church, is faced with a history of bloodshed, tears, tyranny, torture and every brutal means of evil treatment against anyone outside the Roman orthodox church, or they have no history to write about.

These laws of Justinian’s code, that gave impetus and license to centuries of cruel, repressive and beastly treatment of people, declared, among other things:

 a. No place allowed for “heretics” (anyone opposed to the orthodox faith and it’s manner of administration) for the conduct of their convictions of God and the Bible.

 b. No one shall dare publicly oppose the doctrine of the trinity.

 c. All under this law assume the name of Catholic Christians, and others are considered demented and insane.

 d. All bodies of heretics are prevented from holding assemblies.

 e. Those who do not accept these doctrines shall cease to apply the name of true religion to their fraudulent beliefs.

 f. Any “seditious” outbreak (by heretics) we order to be driven out of the cities with relentless violence.

 g. All churches throughout the world shall be placed under the control of the orthodox bishops who have embraced the Nicene creed.

What a license for tyranny and spiritual enslavement.

But the truth of God and those who long to believe and proclaim it, cannot forever be denied. They may be suppressed, oppressed, distressed and martyred for their faith, but they keep coming. The long, dark history of the centuries of Roman dominance of every vestige of faith, reveals this to be true. The following examples show that, far from emulating the humble Galilean and his word, that the relentless, barbaric nature of “Paganism clothed in a Christian name”, displayed this pagan spirit in the merciless slaughter of millions who dared embrace any form of religion other than Romanism. And these are only a few examples.

 a. Already we have given an account of the “St. Bartholomew’s massacre, approved by the church of Rome.

 b. In the 12th century, Peter Waldo preached strongly against the Pope. His many followers were called “Waldenses”. When Pope Alexander III learned of Waldo’s teachings, he excommunicated the Waldenses and ordered the bishop of Lyons to exterminate them from the face of the earth. All that was required to label one as guilty of (Waldensen) heresy, was a mere accusation, factual or perceived. No trial was necessary. The character of the accuser made no difference; even anonymous letters were deemed sufficient to convict and burn someone. Age, rank nor sex mattered. If you had an estate you were a special target. Showing a kindness to an accused person, resulted in your condemnation also. The dreadful and despicable inquisition (more on this later) began against the Waldenses, by a monk named Dominic, who instituted the order of the “Dominic friars”. This order was subsequently the principal “inquisitor” in the various assaults on freedom that followed.

 c. The Albigenses were another group who endured severe persecutions. One of their preachers, Rev. Adrian Chalinski, was roasted alive by a slow fire.

 d. In 1524, John Clark, of Meldin, France, called the Pope the antichrist. For this he was repeatedly whipped; branded in the forehead; had his right hand and nose cut off. As he sang the 115th Psalm, he was thrown into the fire and burned to death.

 e. Many others about this time were beaten, racked, and burnt to death. A native of Malda was burnt by a slow fire for saying that Mass was a plain denial of the passion and death of Christ.

 f. Francis Bribard, secretary to Cardinal de Pellay, for speaking favorably of reform, has his tongue cut out, and was then burned.

 g. Fourteen men who favored reform, were burnt to death at Malda, while their wives were forced to watch the execution.

 h. In 1554, two men and a son and daughter, had their tongues cut out; were covered with grease, brimstone and gunpowder, and set fire.

 i. Protestants were expelled from all offices, trades, privileges and employment, thereby depriving them of bread. Midwives were not allowed to deliver babies, but compelled these mothers to be controlled by brutal people. Their children were taken from them, educated and made to embrace Popery.

j. Protestants were assembled and told to become Catholic or die.

k. The Inquisition! The most awful, iniquitous, brutal and barbaric institution ever conceived was the inquisition. That it was ordained, promoted, approved of and sustained by the Pope himself, in the name of the Catholic religion, against the most innocent and just individuals is, in and of itself, ample justification for branding the entire Roman system as the “abomination of desolation”.

The inquisition was a system used to spy out even the most trivial, innocent expression or acts about Papal inconsistencies, and bring them to certain, cruel and beastly consequences. It was in place wherever there was any suspicion of protest. The following description of its office and one example of its barbarism, is sufficient.

 *Carried out in the year 1682, in Madrid, Spain. The officers of the Inquisition, preceded by trumpets, kettledrums, and their banner, marched on the 30th of May, in cavalcade, to the palace of the great square, where they declared by proclamation, that, on the 30th of June, the sentence of the prisoners would be put in execution.*

*Of these prisoners, twenty men and women, with one Mahometan, were ordered to be burned; fifty Jews and Jeweses, having never before been imprisoned, and repenting of being of the Jewish religion (their crime), were sentenced to a long confinement and to wear a yellow cap. The whole court of Spain was present on this occasion.*

*Now mass began, in the midst of which the priest came from the altar, placed himself near the scaffold, and seated himself in a chair prepared for that purpose. The chief inquisitor then descended from the amphitheater, dressed in his cope, and having a miter on his head. After having bowed to the altar, he advanced towards the king’s balcony, and went up to it, attended by some of his officers, carrying a cross and the gospels, with a book containing the oath by which the kings of Spain oblige themselves to protect the Catholic faith, to extirpate heretics, and to support with all their power and force the prosecutions and decrees of the Inquisition: a like oath was administered to the counselors and whole assembly. The Mass was begun about twelve at noon, and did not end until nine in the evening, being protracted by a proclamation of the sentences of the several “criminals”.*

*After this, followed the burnings of the twenty-one men and women. The king was not allowed (by the church) to be absent from this scene, because it is esteemed a religious act; and his coronation oath obliged him to give a sanction by his presence to all the acts of the tribunal.*

*An example of the brutal torture carried out by the Inquisition on those accused is as follows: At the first time of torturing, six executioners entered, stripped him naked to his underwear, and laid him upon his back on a kind of stand, elevated a few feet from the floor. An iron collar was put around his neck, and a ring to each foot, which fastened him to the stand. With his limbs stretched out, they wound two ropes round each thigh; which ropes being passed under the scaffold, through holes made for that purpose, were all drawn tight at the same instant of time, by four of the men, on a given signal.*

*The pains which immediately succeeded were intolerable; the ropes, which were of a small size, cut through the prisoner’s flesh to the bone, making the blood to gush out. Since the prisoner would not make any confession to what the Inquisitors required, the ropes were drawn in this manner four times successively.*

*After this, they went through another cruel method of torture trying to extract a confession. Since he did not die, he was allowed 2 months to partially recover, and then tortured again. There is more, but a godly mind can hardly bear to hear it.*

Under what conceivable justification can such barbaric, insane and beastly acts be justified? This is as cruel and inhumane as German and Japanese atrocities of WWII, of the countless instances of torturing by communist regimes. For this inhumane torture to be carried on in the Name of Christ, is the highest of blasphemy and abomination. No matter what interpretations you see fit to assign to the visions, images and symbols of brutality described in the book of Revelation, history, irrefutable history, has necessarily consumed a majority of its story of the dark ages with millions of accounts of this “Trail Of Blood And Tears”. If this is the fruit of the gigantic “tree” of the “Holy Roman Empire”, intelligent reasoning can only conclude that the “foundational, philosophic and doctrinal roots”, are the source of such “fruit”. It only follows that the dear name of Christ has absolutely no association to such despicable human (mis)behavior, which deserves the anathema of the entire human family.

To attempt to hid or offset these atrocities, it might be argued that the Roman church did many outstanding good things in the society of man. And it would be true that many good things were done through the years by the Roman church. Things such as institutions of higher education, hospitals and charities and charitable deeds in large number certainly could be attributed to the Roman church. However, no amount of good, philanthropy or societal contributions can offset or justify the unrelenting centuries of abominable practices. In addition, the merciless resentment against any form of expression of faith apart from the Roman Church, is inexcusable. And the heinous torture carried out by the Inquisition, under the auspices of the Roman church and with the sanction of the Pope, is despicable. The Roman Inquisition was, and ever shall be an abominable, cowardly disgrace to human existence. And yet, there is more to be told.

With the onset of the reformation with Martin Luther and forward for almost 300 years, a battle raged throughout Europe. Primarily, it was, on the one hand, the developing faith of reformers simply breaking away from Roman theology and autocracy, with its related tyranny, and on the other hand, the overwhelming counter-reformation methods of the Roman church. Those methods were not in the form of debate and scriptural argument, but in the form of bloodshed and butchery, such as already noted in St. Bartholomew’s massacre. It was a life or death struggle, and often the outcome for the reformers was in doubt. Not only did Martin Luther have to take on both the powers of the empire as well as the powers of the Roman church, but all who followed with their own break from Rome. Let us consider a few more examples of this “bloodshed and butchery”.

Martin Luther, a Catholic monk, became disturbed by his own personal study of the Bible and came to the conclusion that “the just shall live by faith”, and not by Roman creeds and priestly mediation. He was further disturbed by the ridiculous policy of indulgences practiced by Rome, essentially to raise money. He prepared and nailed 95 statements against indulgencies, to the cathedral door in Whittenburg, in 1517, and the war was on. Soon Luther was excommunicated from the church, and his life was in danger. He was ordered to come before the emperor Charles and answer questions about his books and teachings. Before the diet of Worms, Luther stood steadfast to his claims of papal error and false Roman doctrines. He would have been killed, but God had other plans, and he was secretly hidden so that he could continue his work.

John Wicliffe, called the “morning star” of the reformation, brilliantly exposed and opposed Roman errors for many years. He was the first to call the pope the “antichrist”. Though he died a natural death, his entire life was constantly harassed, persecuted and many times attempts were made to stop him completely. A learned and brilliant man, Wicliffe preached against Roman errors from many pulpits and for many years. He was opposed by every authority of Rome.

Next, the account of the murder of Daniel Rambaut deserves our attention. A father of a numerous family, he was apprehended, and, with several others, committed to prison, in the jail of Paysana. He was regularly visited by many priests with their importunities to persuade him to renounce the Protestant religion and turn papist; but this he refused. They told him that he might spare his life if he would subscribe to the belief of the following articles.

 a. The real presence (of Jesus) in the host.

 b. Transubstantiation.

 c. Purgatory

 d. The pope’s infallibility

 e. That Masses said for the dead will release souls from purgatory.

 f. That praying to saints will procure the remission of sins.

 Rambaut refused their importunities and categorically denounced each of the proposed items. The priests were so highly offended at his answers to these articles, that they determined to shake his resolution by the most cruel methods imaginable. They ordered one joint of his finger to be cut off every day until all his fingers were gone; then they proceeded in the same manner with his toes. Finding that he bore his sufferings with the most admirable patience, and increased both in fortitude and resignation, and maintained his faith steadfastly, they stabbed him to the heart, and then gave his body to be devoured by the dogs.

John Huss was born in Hussenitz, a village in Bohemia, about 1380. A very learned man who pastured churches and was dean of a university. His preaching followed the same convictions as John wickliffe. The archbishop of Prague, had the writings of Wickliffe condemned and forbade their publications and preaching. John Huss, though greatly favored by the people, was nevertheless, excommunicated, along with all of his friends and followers. John was summoned to a general council, and was promised a safe-conduct for his appearance. In spite of this assurance of safety, Huss was arrested as soon as he arrived and put in prison. The pope at the time said that it was the emperor who gave the promise of safe-conduct, and the pope was not bound by the emperor. Huss was told it was not lawful for him to go beyond the pope and appeal to Christ for his conscience. Huss was mocked and scorned by this council. He was considered to be guilty of treason for expressing his right to appeal to Christ as his judge, instead of the pope.

Huss was led to the stake in chains, and he accepted it as suffering with Christ. The duke of Bavaria tried to get him to recant before they burned him. Huss replied, no, and said: I have never preached any doctrine of an evil tendency; what I taught with my lips, I now seal with my blood. He told the executioner, “you are now going to burn a goose (Huss signifies goose in the Bohemian language) but in a century you will have a swan which you can neither roast or boil. About one hundred years later, Martin Luther came along, who had a swan for his arms. While the fire engulfed him, John Huss sang with a cheerful voice which could be heard by the multitude present. They gathered his ashes and cast them in the river Rhine. The pope and his followers had silenced the voice of a good and godly man, but they could not silence the coming (spiritual) earthquake of the reformation.

There are many more accounts of the brutal barbarity of the papal system, armed with insidious and ignominious devices as the inquisition, upheld by papal power and fury. Time and space will not allow all of them. We will close this portion of the “Trail Of Blood And Tears”, with the account of the martyrdom of William Tyndale.

William Tyndale, a man recognized as possessing impeccable character; a very learned man and deeply devoted to the scriptures. There was a time, before his most severe persecution and excommunication, that he frequently had long discourse with ranking religious leaders about the truth of the word of God. Ere long however, they came to resent and reject him and his insistence upon the authority of scripture above the pope. Once brought before a sitting of the bishop’s chancellor, and Tyndale was maligned, ridiculed and treated like a dog, with false accusations from every quarter.

Tyndale, under fear of assault in England, fled to Germany. While there, and having such a passion for his people to have access to the word of God, he concluded that it was essential that the Bible be translated in their own language. With priests using another language and also grossly misrepresenting even the simplest of truth, it was virtually impossible for the common people to gain even the least understanding of the real truth from the Bible. Tyndale considered this withholding and misrepresentation of the scriptures by the Roman system, to be the cause of all mischief in the church, that the scriptures were hidden from the people. For so long the abominable practices and subtle deceitfulness in covering up the scriptures, maintained by the pharisaical clergy could not be exposed since they labored with all their might to keep the scriptures hidden, so that neither should it be read, or if it was, the clergy would darken the right sense with the mist of their sophistry, wresting the scriptures to their own purposes. For this reason, William Tyndale was stirred to translate the scripture in his mother tongue, for the profit of the simple people of his country. This he did in 1525, to the dismay and hate of leaders of the orthodox church.

For a while the translations and publications of Tyndale were very widely, though secretly, distributed and read. The people were greatly drawn to them. Finally, however, through a deceitful scheme, Tyndale was arrested and put in prison. He was condemned to die, and in A.D. 1536, William Tyndale was burned at the stake. His crime: reading, preaching, translating and distributing the word God. How deep is the sin and hate of a religious system that, when the teaching of the Bible is openly advocated, that it stirs such a system to passionate jealousy, hate and murder. And the fair name of Christ is smeared with it all.

 God is long suffering, and far beyond what any human would endure, he lets his own providence work. The day of reckoning for such unbridled and tyrannical abuse of Christianity may be delayed, but it will never be avoided. Great were her unspeakable atrocities and great will be her fall.

While the history of the “Trail Of Blood And Tears” from the early 6th century through the end of the 18th century, is clearly and indisputably revealed and recorded by every historian writing of that time, yet there are some reasons, for us to approach this history with a very broad understanding and perspective of the impact and conclusions the church of today has of it. There are many reasons for this precaution. By and large, today’s churches and church members are basically ignorant of the suffering, martyrdom and beastly treatment of saints of God during this era of time. Moreover, they are also ignorant of the fact that it was the predominant , orthodox Church that carried out these abuses. That church was the Roman Catholic Church. Under the leadership of the papal priestly system with a power imputed to the “Holy See” by the Justinian code of law, and the usurpation of both civil and religious authority by this system throughout its long reign, the Roman Catholic church, by her, misguided, selfish, system of absurd religious claims, practices and doctrines, perpetrated the multitude of blasphemy against all who opposed her. There is no way, using the Bible as our guide, that you can justify, excuse or overlook the terrible crimes against humanity and the saints of God that history so manifestly declares were wrought by the Roman system. It is a long, dark, despicable chapter of woe, corruption and abominations against the gospel of Christ and every decent, pure spirit everywhere.

When you read the history of the church of the period of about 1300 years from Justinian to Napoleon, you are awe-struck with disbelief that the name of Christ and his gospel could in any way be associated with that history. The very suggestion that Jesus was Lord of such atrocities is preposterous. Further, insofar as I can determine there has been no general acknowledgement or any apology or remorse on the part of the Roman system.

With the passing of time, it has become a subject that is out of sight and out of mind for most churches and professing Christians. The result of this apathetic sense of irrelevance concerning such abominations, is that there is a general conclusion of “so what”. It didn’t happen to me or in my time, so why be concerned about something that took place centuries before? The answer to that question and attitude is, in fact, the reason we have the book of Revelation. Suffice it to say for now, that the story of the Christian church has been dramatically influenced in its journey and destination by the catastrophic events it has endured. Because of that journey, our own relationship to God and his kingdom and our very real relevance to it today, is fundamentally impacted by this history.

All of this being said, there is another perspective which is important for us to remember, as our minds are mesmerized and consumed by the horrors of dark-age tyranny. That perspective is that there was some good in the midst of evil. While the facts of history puts the blame for the millions of martyrs squarely at the feet of the papal system, we should not forget that there were good, well meaning people, whose hearts did not condone or rejoice over the travesties of injustice perpetrated by the Roman system. In our zeal to condemn, and justly so, the horrible acts of pure barbarism, let us never forget that captivated in this system were hearts and lives with no way out to freedom, whose basic view of life could well have been led to more noble virtues, if they had had the chance. In addition, the Catholic church of the dark ages was the source of many good works. Hospitals, universities, charities and many others. Martin Luther, John Wickliffe, William Tyndale, each were first a part of the Roman system.

This is in no way intended to justify or ameliorate the persecutions of the Roman Catholic Church. But neither should we destroy the good with our condemnation of the evil. The doctrines of the church of the dark ages that were unscriptural then, are still so today. There should not be an attitude of snobbery, blanket condemnation or blanket approval of Catholics, or any other group. God should be the final judge of everyone. We can freely judge ideas, doctrines and works, while leaving the “life” in God’s hands. To this day, the pope still claims infallibility. I am sure his devout followers embrace this concept. For us it is a totally unscriptural concept, which has no place in Christian faith. We can justifiably, and I believe, scripturally condemn such a self elevating doctrine. And while all who embrace it may or may not know the Lord, yet we are not responsible for them. They are responsible to God; leave it there. And that should also apply to all those who think that it does not matter what doctrine you believe or what church you belong to, that all of them are a part of the “body” of Christ. But those who see it that way, you will find, also have those groups (like us) that they would soundly condemn as non-Christian. The entire issue should be brought lovingly to the Bible and let the Holy Spirit guide us to the truth through it.

We have the same justification, if any at all, to judge Baptists, Presbyterians, UPC, Methodist, Mormons, Jehovah’s Witness, etc., as we do the Catholics. I have been branded as a cult by a major denominational minister. I have also been apologized to by several of his members for his actions. Always leave your doors open and your bridges crossable for reconciliation and union with any individual. Be not hasty in judgment, but be ready to show mercy and compassion. Let everything be done decently, truthfully and in order. Never make any commitment or concession to anything until you can verify its scriptural accuracy. And be sure you have heard both sides of an issue before you pass judgment on it.

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